

of the fire that was sending embers more than 2 miles ahead of the flames and headed right for Highway 60 and the town of Show Low. Rick directed and participated in implementing burnouts, dozier lines, back burns, and other efforts to create a line of defense protecting the towns from what seemed to be the inevitable. He continued these activities even after his first attempt was blown over by the flames. Fortunately for the towns of Show Low, Pinetop, Lakeside, Honda and Whiteriver, this line of defense did in fact stifle and prevent the fire's run through these towns.

"He's not one of those guys who sits on the ridge with binoculars telling you what to do," said Jim Paxon, a Forest Service spokesman during the Rodeo-Chediski Fire. I personally was in Show Low during Rick's heroic action and he was credited by all present with stopping the fire's progress toward Show Low.

It was his hands-on management approach that nearly took Rick's life last Wednesday. Rick and several others were working on a controlled fire. As Rick walked into a canyon to check the edge of the fire line, a storm front caused the wind to blow up and the fire surrounded Rick, leaving him to face the fire. The winds were so strong that it blew away his emergency shelter.

Without shelter, Rick lay down among the flames waiting for the fire to burn over him, and then walked a half mile out to find help. According to Dr. Daniel Caruso, Rick was burned over 40 percent of his body and is currently in critical condition, being treated for severe burns and damage to his lungs.

A family man, Rick is married to his wife, Evelyn, and is father to three sons, Sean, Daniel and Brent, each of whom plans to become a firefighter.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the courage of this man and his success in saving so many from the destruction of fire.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LIPINSKI) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. LIPINSKI addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

POSSIBLE MISUSE OF OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY RESOURCES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, most Americans have never visited the little west Texas community town of Hale Center. It is a good community, a little under 3,000 people, the heart of the west Texas Bible Belt. Having not been there recently, I imagine they probably have a local pharmacy and a great little public school. But according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security,

Hale Center, Texas, a town of under 3,000 people, must be a terrorist threat to the United States.

Why do I say that? Well, it is the only legitimate reason I can think of as to why last week, while al Qaeda was apparently planning and carrying out murders of citizens in Saudi Arabia, including Americans, and a terrorist attack in Morocco, our U.S. Homeland Security Agency, with the responsibility to protect American citizens from terrorism, was doing what? They were checking a private airplane flight leaving from Hale Center, Texas, that fine little Bible Belt community, a plane that was going to that other, I guess, center of Islamic radical terrorism, Ardmore, Oklahoma.

Now, the truth was that on that airplane was former Speaker and now legislator of the Texas House, Pete Laney, a fine American. Even his worst political enemies would never suggest he is a terrorist. Yet our U.S. Homeland Security Agency, working through the forces and offices in California, spent our tax dollars tracking down Mr. Laney as he flew in his own plane from Hale Center, Texas, to Ardmore.

Now, I will say, they do have on the 4th of July every year in Hale Center, Texas, a county fiddlers' contest. Perhaps Mr. Ridge and our Homeland Security Agency should go visit Hale Center and see if maybe that fiddlers' contest is a front for al Qaeda. Certainly if there is an al Qaeda cell headquartered in Hale City, Texas, Americans ought to know about it.

There is something else Americans have a right to know about. They have a right to know what is on the tape between the Texas Department of Public Safety last week and their phone conversation with the U.S. Homeland Security Agency that led to our using and abusing Federal tax dollars to track down Mr. Laney and his air flight from Hale Center, Texas. There is no justification for that kind of abuse of resources of an agency that ought to be focusing its attention on how to stop terrorism here in the United States.

This issue of the Texas legislators going to Ardmore is no longer just a Texas issue. It is the fundamental question of whether American taxpayers can have faith that our U.S. Homeland Security Agency is going to track down terrorists, rather than track down law-abiding American citizens.

I voted to create that agency. I voted to fund that agency. But if this agency is going to abuse tax dollars and undermine our ability to fight terrorists by tracking down in frivolous efforts a State legislator who is a great, respected law-abiding citizen of Texas, then something is wrong, something is amiss; and we need to make some changes at the Department of Homeland Security.

Now, the question I think American citizens, Mr. Speaker, have a right to ask Mr. Ridge and the Homeland Security Agency is, what are you afraid of?

Why are you unwilling to let the American people hear what is on that telephone conversation? In fact, that tape was made with U.S. public tax dollars. Why not let the public, the citizens who paid for that tape, listen to what is on it? Are they afraid it might implicate our Federal agencies and leaders who made the decision to abuse Federal tax resources to track down a law-abiding citizen involved in a Texas political dispute? Are they afraid that perhaps maybe the Speaker of the Texas House, Mr. Craddick, or even the House Majority Leader, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DELAY), were involved in asking the Federal agency to get involved in this inappropriate way?

Frankly, no one will know the answer to those questions until the Department of Homeland Security lets the public fulfill its right to listen to what is on that tape. If it exonerates these State and Federal officials, why has Mr. Ridge not already divulged the tape to the public? If it implicates Federal officials and State officials, perhaps that is the explanation as to why they have denied us the right to listen to that tape.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious issue. The Texas legislators are back at work in Austin. But this issue will not go away, for one simple reason: the American public and American taxpayers have a right to know whether their tax dollars have been used unethically and perhaps illegally. They have a right to know whether Texas State public officials were involved in asking the Federal agency to put aside its efforts for a moment in their fight against terrorists who might attack our homeland and focus on an internal Texas political dispute where no State or Federal law was broken.

When will we know what is on that tape, who is implicated in that tape? We have a right to know the answer to those questions, and the public and press will not stop until our U.S. Homeland Security Agency provides those answers.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. BEAUPREZ) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BEAUPREZ addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

TEXAS AND TAXES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. SHERMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Speaker, I came down here to talk about taxes, but first